



WHAT IS A HEALTHY SCHOOL NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT?

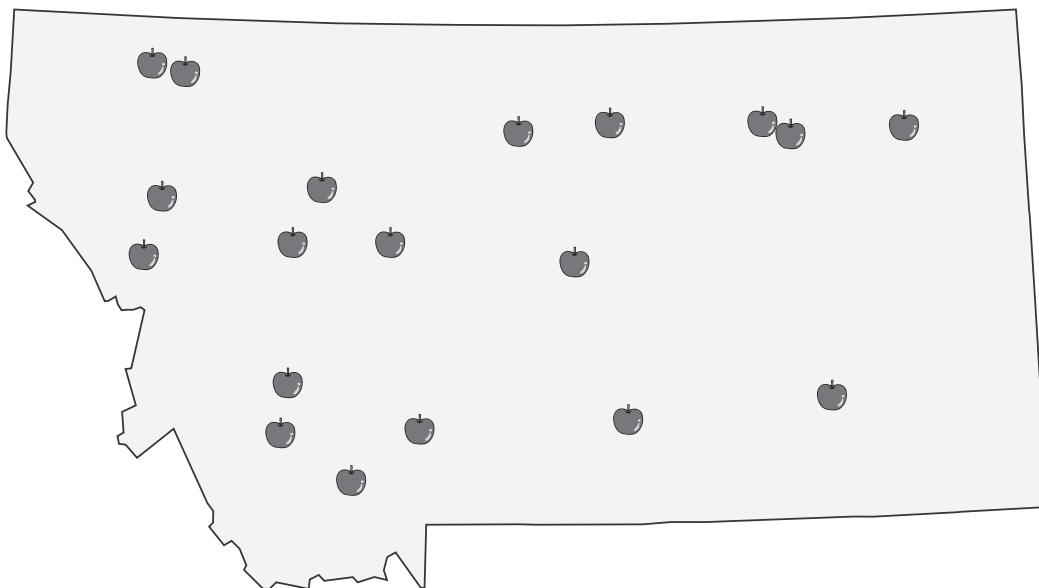
A healthy school nutrition environment gives students consistent, reliable health information and the opportunity to use it. Superintendents, principals, classroom teachers, school foodservices, support staff, and other school activities all provide the same clear and consistent messages that reinforce healthy eating and physical activity habits. The foods offered at school foodservice meals, vending machines, and student stores all reflect and model these messages. Students learn to make healthy choices in an environment where healthy choices are available, not just referred to. Teachers are role models for healthy lifestyle behaviors.

Montana schools play a key role in children's health and learning. Our schools help students excel both mentally and physically by making a commitment to supporting, building and maintaining a healthy school nutrition environment.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has identified six components of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment. Each one has an impact on nutrition and physical activity. Please read on to learn about the six components, definitions of success for each component and what Montana schools are doing to boost students' health and brainpower. The six components of a healthy school nutrition environment are:

- 1. A Commitment to Nutrition and Physical Activity;*
- 2. Quality School Meals;*
- 3. Other Healthy Food Choices;*
- 4. Pleasant Eating Experiences;*
- 5. Nutrition Education; and*
- 6. Marketing.*

Schools across the state of Montana are taking action to make nutrition and physical activity part of their daily routines.





The First Component of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

A COMMITMENT TO NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Healthy eating and physical activity are essential for students to achieve their full academic and physical potential, mental growth, and lifelong health and well-being. Schools are a great place to influence student's eating and physical activity patterns. In a school committed to a healthy nutrition environment, every member of the education team makes nutrition and physical activity top priorities every day.

Examples of Montana success stories—schools taking action for healthy kids:

Rocky Boy K–12 School serves 515 students on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation.

Rocky Boy school is an excellent example of a “holistic” approach to improving the school nutrition environment. By building support from the top down (superintendent, principal, teachers, and foodservice staff) and involving the students, parents, and community members, major changes have taken place. The school breakfast and lunch

menus are written by a dietitian who ensures that healthy, low fat, high fiber, colorful meals are served. A salad bar is offered on a regular basis. Vending machines offer only healthy choices. The student store no longer sells candy, and instead offers baked chips, trail mix, jerky and low-fat pizza. Teachers have agreed not to use food/candy as a classroom reward. The Rocky Boy Healthy School Team is comprised of 40 motivated people from the school and community that meet on a yearly basis to support and implement changes to create a healthy school nutrition environment.

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- Schools have detailed policies regarding nutrition and physical activity.
- Administrators, school staff, school foodservice, students and parents are part of the policy making process, education team, and participate in supporting a healthy school nutrition environment.
- Nutrition education and physical activity are included in the school's daily educational program from prekindergarten through grade 12.

Whitefish Central Middle School serves 700 students in Whitefish. Kim Anderson, principal, serves as a dedicated leader across the state and nation in promoting school nutrition and physical activity. He and his staff have made changes to help kids eat better, provide a more relaxed eating environment and improve

student behavior. At Central Middle School, all soft drinks have been removed from vending machines and replaced with bottled water and 100 percent juices. Candy has been removed from vending machines and the school lunch a la carte program, so that no candy is available for sale to students during school hours. The PTA purchased a refrigerated vending machine that is stocked daily with milk, yogurt, pudding, string cheese, beef jerky, baked chips and fruit.

“You can not put a price on the benefits of good nutrition. I have supported these changes in our school nutrition environment because I believe that this could be the missing link to a better learning environment and improved academic achievement. If we want our kids to do better on a regular basis, we need to offer them healthier choices.”

—Kim Anderson, Principal,
Central Middle School, Whitefish



The student council stocks the machine and receives the profits from it. Healthful a' la carte offerings in the lunchroom now include homemade pretzels, bagels and salads, as well as Subway® sandwiches, baked chips and fresh fruit. The lunchtime recess schedule was changed to allow students to have recess before lunch. Since these changes, lunchroom discipline problems, as well as after lunch referrals to the principal's office, have decreased dramatically. Teachers report improved student behavior and attentiveness in afternoon classes. Through the school's commitment to health, data collection and by building awareness and support of involved stakeholders (parents, foodservice staff, and students), a strong health message is conveyed to students with academic benefits.

Anderson School serves 185 students, grades K–8, in Bozeman. The health enhancement teacher and principal initiated changes to keep students active and properly hydrated. Students are encouraged to drink more water throughout the school day, thanks to the addition of five water coolers located throughout the hallways and in the lunchroom. This improved access to water helps keep children hydrated, ensures that a healthy beverage choice is readily available and models a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. Physical activity is encouraged for all students through participation in a voluntary mileage club, in which students' walking miles are tracked during recess. Awards are given to those who participate, and overall mileage is displayed on a visual map. Children learn about the benefits of both water and physical activity in their health classes, and these healthy behaviors are strongly reinforced through the school environment.

Billings Action for Healthy Kids (BAFHK) has been meeting since November 2003. Led by health professionals from Deaconess Billings Clinic, St. Vincent Healthcare, and Yellowstone City-County Health Department, this group of concerned community members has developed into a strong team—focused on improving school environments throughout Yellowstone County. With encouragement from the Superintendent and Education Committee of School District #2, the group is working toward suggesting sustainable, systemic changes in nutrition and physical activity for local schools. BAFHK has raised community awareness through media coverage – and is gathering community input and support through a public forum, a consumer survey, and meetings with various groups, including the Yellowstone Valley PTA, Rotary, and local vendors. In addition to improving nutrition and physical opportunities in schools, BAFHK is working to develop school wellness policies to meeting USDA requirements for the 2005–06 school year.

"If we can address the issue [of childhood obesity] with individuals earlier in life, we have a greater chance of eradicating this condition. Through the efforts of task force members, we hope to broaden the impact to form a lasting partnership dedicated to having children in our schools and their families living healthier lifestyles."

—Nicholas Wolter, MD, CEO, Deaconess Billings Clinic, and
Michelle Hood, CEO, St. Vincent Healthcare, Billings



The Second Component of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

QUALITY SCHOOL MEALS

Healthy school meals provide energy and nutrients children need for sound minds and bodies. Studies confirm what parents and teachers have said for years: Children who are poorly nourished have difficulty learning. The variety of nutrient-rich foods offered in school meal programs allows children to learn to enjoy many different foods and develop healthy eating patterns.

Examples of Montana success stories—schools taking action for healthy kids:

The Montana Team Nutrition Program's School Food Service Peer Trainer Network is a group of outstanding school foodservice directors and managers from Montana schools. They are available to share their expertise with other school foodservice professionals throughout the state. The trainers act as mentors to assist

other schools in their efforts to provide healthy meals that meet the USDA regulations in a cost effective manner. With support through the Montana Team Nutrition Program, the peer trainers assist other schools in: promoting school meals, offering healthy foods, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, working towards creating a healthier school environment, and promoting healthful a' la carte options. For more information, contact Montana Team Nutrition at (406) 994-5641. A directory of the Peer Trainer Network is available at <http://www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/index.html>, listed under the Fresh Bytes menu.

Ronan School District serves 1,350 students, grades K–12, on the Flathead Indian Reservation. This school has accomplished the challenging feat of getting teenagers to eat more fruits and vegetables in the school lunch and breakfast programs. By utilizing the USDA Commodity Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, the creative foodservice director created a fresh fruit bar at breakfast and a salad bar at lunch at the middle and high school. Fresh produce is served in an attractive, grab-and-go style. As a result, students taking fruit at the breakfast program has increased from 25 to 150 each day! Much of the success has been attributed to the school foodservice staff, whose motto is: Students are considered customers, whom expect and deserve high quality food presented in a fun way.

Ennis Public Schools serve 370 students, grades K–12, in Ennis. Healthy school environment successes include: the removal of all candy and soft drink vending machines from elementary and high school buildings (vending machines now offer water and juice) and a completely new approach to school meals headed up by a talented, committed foodservice director. The foodservice's

"Kids come first and whatever benefits their learning activity should be a priority."

—Mr. Doug Walsh, Superintendent,
Ennis Public Schools

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- Schools offer lunch, breakfast and afterschool snack programs, and students are encouraged to participate.
- School foodservice staff is properly qualified and trained.
- Menus are planned with input from students and include local, cultural, and ethnic favorites of students, while meeting the USDA nutrition standards.



philosophy of service is based on a four point plan: 1) Kids need to be involved, so ask them what they would like; 2) offer healthy choices every day; 3) have a fun atmosphere; and 4) make the kids feel welcome and wanted. Administrative support, role modeling of healthy behaviors by school staff, and the popular, kid-appealing menus have resulted in increased participation in the school breakfast and lunch programs.

Missoula Hellgate Elementary School serves 1,235 students, grades K–8, in Missoula. This school has focused on serving students balanced meals, comprised of kid-friendly foods served in an eye-appealing manner. Foods served are high quality and the majority is cooked from scratch. Fresh produce and freshly baked items are offered daily. Presentation is a priority, so menus meet the USDA nutrient standards in a colorful, attractive manner. Healthy choices are available and encouraged on a daily basis, in a welcoming environment. A recess before lunch policy allows K–2nd graders a more relaxed eating environment. With more attention to make the cafeteria a relaxing and pleasant place to be, student participation has increased to 70 percent per day. Starting at grade three, multiple choices are available to students through a traditional hot lunch line and a reimbursable a' la carte line.

"The kids are our customers. Our goals are to keep them happy, to help them learn how to eat healthier, and to feed their bodies so that their minds can grow. No one can learn on an empty stomach."

—Ms. Tammy Wham, Foodservice Supervisor,
Ennis Public Schools



The Third Component of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

OTHER HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS

The quality of the school nutrition environment depends on the quality of all foods and beverages sold or served at school. Foods with little nutrition compete with healthy school meals and send mixed messages to students, undermining nutrition education efforts to promote healthy eating. School nutrition policies should address all foods served on school grounds or at school events including: a' la carte options, vending machine offerings, snack bars, school stores, concession stands, and foods/beverages sold for fundraising or served at parties. Decisions regarding the sale of competitive foods should be based on nutrition goals for students, not on profit making.

Examples of Montana success stories—schools taking action for healthy kids:

East Middle School serves 912 students, grades

6–8, in Great Falls. Students at this school took an action plan developed at a Montana Behavioral Initiative workshop and put it into practice, winning the support of other students, school staff and community members. At first, these brave students and their faculty advisor faced a great deal of resistance. Now the student store offers a variety of healthy snack and drink choices.

The cafeteria's a' la carte also offers a variety

of healthy choices at lunch. Vending machine options have changed as well. The vending machine company started stocking healthy choices, which sold better than expected, leading to one candy machine being replaced by a "healthy choices" vending machine. All vending machines, with exception of the healthy choice machine, are turned off during the school day. Keys to success included surveying students for snack preferences, limiting access to unhealthy food and beverage choices, pricing the healthy items lower than similar, but less healthy, items and a schoolwide marketing plan to promote new snack selections.

Lewistown Public Schools serve 1,446 students, grades K–12, in Lewistown. Students at this school enjoy

"When young people speak, adults listen, and it was our student leaders who pulled our school and community together on this project. Led by the voice of our students, help and contributions from the community were major factors in making this project successful."

—Jenny Painter, Teacher, East Middle School, Great Falls

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- All foods and beverages available at school contribute to meeting the dietary needs of students.
- There are appropriate restrictions on students' access to vending machines, school stores, and snack bars.
- School staff does not use food as a reward or punishment for students.
- If foods are sold in competition with school meals or in an a' la carte line, they include a variety of tasty, nutritious options, offered at prices children can afford.



as meat and cheese sandwiches on homemade bread, healthy beverages, calcium-rich snacks, jerky, pretzels, granola bars, and fresh fruits and vegetables. All foods are prepared fresh and presented in a colorful and eye-appealing manner. Friendly cafeteria staff, an innovative foodservice director, and marketing of their school foodservice program have led to increased access to healthy foods throughout the school.

Emerson School serves 430 students, grades K–6, in Butte. Kathlyn Swann, a concerned and committed parent, has spearheaded positive changes in vending and has worked with the principal and teachers to successfully implement a non-food classroom reward system. All pop machines have been removed from the school building with hopes to offer water and 100 percent fruit juice. Students are enjoying non-food rewards such as small toys, charm pens, and party favors in lieu of candy. Administrator and teacher support strengthened by having the facts ready (the Changing the Scene Toolkit presentation) and then sharing these facts at a staff meeting. Teacher feedback is sought in regards to the types of non-food rewards they prefer to use. This project is sustainable by fundraising efforts within the school system. Students are rewarded using methods that don't contribute to tooth decay and emotional eating. Teachers benefit too, as well nourished students learn better, behave better, and are absent less often.

"Everyone wins when people work together for the highest good of the kids!"

—Kathlyn Swann, parent and health educator, Butte



The Fourth Component of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

PLEASANT EATING EXPERIENCES

Children will enjoy their food more and may try more healthy foods if they can relax, eat and socialize without feeling rushed. Studies show that environment has a powerful influence on behavior. A pleasant dining area allows students to pay attention to what they are eating, and to enjoy the sensory and social aspects of a healthy meal.

The timing of student meals and recess is also an important component. Montana schools which schedule recess before lunch benefit by:

- Students and school staff enjoy a pleasant and more relaxed lunch room environment.
- Schools notice decreased discipline problems on the playground, in the cafeteria, and in the classroom.
- Students consume more milk, helping to meet their calcium requirements, while wasting less food overall.

Examples of Montana success stories—schools taking action for healthy kids:

Poplar Public School serves 952 students, grades K–12, on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Poplar. This school serves freshly prepared meals, including a daily salad bar, in one of the most unique dining areas in the state. Under the recent direction

of a new school foodservice manager, the cafeteria has been transformed to a bright, artful, welcoming place for

“When the younger kids go to recess before lunch, students solve many social problems that might have come up before they come back to class and don’t bring arguments into the classroom. And, they don’t take 10 minutes of class time to become settled after lunch. They get right to their work.”

—Kim Debruycker, Superintendent,
Gallatin Gateway Elementary School

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- Meal periods are long enough for students to eat and socialize.
- Dining areas are attractive and have sufficient space for seating.
- Recess for elementary grades is scheduled before lunch so that children will come to lunch less distracted and ready to eat.
- Schools encourage interaction among students, and between students and adults. Adults properly supervise dining rooms and serve as role models.
- Students wash their hands before eating.
- Drinking fountains are available for students to get water at meals and throughout the day.

children of all ages to enjoy their meals. A kids’ corner and a fish tank attract youngsters. Murals painted by local student artists as well as a bulletin board which highlights student activities attract the older students. The USDA Commodity Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program provides fresh produce for the daily salad bar. Several years ago, students took the initiative to request a healthier menu. School foodservice has worked with students and other school staff to ensure that healthy, kid-friendly foods are offered and served in a welcoming, pleasant environment.

Meadowlark School serves 126 students, grades K–2, in Conrad. This school serves as an outstanding example of how a recess before lunch policy makes school lunch a more relaxing, social event, rather than



a race to the playground. With support of the principal, school teachers, and the school foodservice staff, a recess before lunch policy was started in the spring 2002. Benefits included improved student behavior, a quieter, pleasant atmosphere in the lunchroom and less beverage waste. Beverage waste decreased by 80 percent. Additional water is offered in the cafeteria during the lunch period, as the school staff noticed that the children were thirstier as a result of having recess before lunch. Many of the students drank extra water after finishing their milk. Another key to this cafeteria's pleasant atmosphere is the daily presence of the principal during lunch and the friendly foodservice staff.

Irle Elementary School, grades K-3, and Eastside Middle School, grades 4-6, serve 422 students in Glasgow.

Children are enjoying their meals in a freshly redecorated cafeteria, which features nicely laminated nutrition and physical activity related posters. Similar posters also grace the walls of the gym, which is used for meal service in addition to the health enhancement classes. Students at both schools eat their meals in a calm, relaxed environment, as they go to recess before lunch; coming in ready to eat, socialize, and enjoy the pleasant atmosphere.

"At Highland Park Elementary, we have noticed less time wasted in transition with our Recess Before Lunch policy. Students are calmer, more settled, and ready to begin learning than when they come in off the playground. This certainly results in more time on task, which provides greater opportunity for improved academic performance and behavior."

—Sharon Redfern, Principal, Highland Park School



The Fifth Component of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

NUTRITION EDUCATION

Building nutrition knowledge and skills about nutrition helps children make healthy eating and physical activity choices. To make a difference, nutrition education for children should be appropriate for students' ages and reflect their cultures, while giving them the chance to practice skills and have fun. The nutrition education curriculum should be easy to teach and meet the state learning standards.

Examples of Montana success stories—schools taking action for healthy kids:

Montana City Elementary school serves 330 students, grades K-8, in Clancy.

A portable food cart, the Milk Mobile, created by seventh grade students, is filled with calcium-rich snacks sold at cost and brought to the classrooms once weekly. Seventh grade students provide classroom education to the K–5 grade classes, about calcium, health topics and healthful food choices. The sixth grade students create a monthly series of cafeteria bulletin boards with the same topics of calcium and health to further support what is being taught in the classrooms. Students receive nutrition education in a fun, creative way, instructed by their fellow students, while enjoying calcium-rich snacks.

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- Students in all grades receive nutrition education that is interactive and teaches the skills they need to adopt healthy eating behaviors.
- Students receive nutrition messages throughout the school that are consistent and reinforce each other.
- Nutrition education is offered in the school dining room and in the classroom, with coordination between school foodservice staff and teachers.
- Nutrition is integrated into core curriculum areas such as math, science and language arts.

Hillcrest Elementary School serves 419 students, grades K-6, in Butte. A six-session afterschool nutrition class was developed to address key nutrition concepts including the Food Guide Pyramid and healthy snacks. Age appropriate workbooks were used for the 1st–3rd graders along with supplemental information sent home to parents. The classes, led by the school nurse, taught the children about healthy snacks, which the students then prepared and enjoyed as their snack. Students completed a pre- and post-curriculum survey to measure nutrition knowledge. Parents reported their satisfaction of the afterschool nutrition class and its influence on choosing snacks at home in a follow up survey.

Eastside Elementary School serves 189 students, grades 4–6, in Glasgow. A one-week nutrition classroom education unit titled the “Nutritious Snacks Sampler” was successful in teaching 4th graders how to choose and prepare a healthy snack. Choosing foods from the Food Guide Pyramid was the basis of the lesson.

“Following the in-school programs, parents reported students were measuring and counting serving sizes at home!”

—MSU Extension Nutrition Assistant

A local dietitian played food pyramid jeopardy with the class. Students researched healthy snack recipes on the Internet, planned the snack menu, and used math skills to measure ingredients



while preparing the recipes. A “Nutritious Snacks Sampler” party was held, allowing the 4th graders to prepare the foods. Favorite recipes included: fruit smoothies, frozen banana pops, melba pizza toast, fruit skewers, daikon radishes, and jicama. A recipe book was created to share with students in other classes, parents, and the after-school snack program. Collaboration among the principal, teachers, school foodservice personnel, local registered dietitian, and community volunteers helped make this project a success.

The Montana State University Extension Nutrition Education Programs offer a variety of practical programs, taught by nutrition assistants in 34 Montana counties.

Montana’s low-income youth are reached through nutrition education taught in 3rd and 5th grade classrooms in Title I schools across the state. One hour programs are delivered once a

“I have noticed children reading ingredient labels during snack time. I believe they have increased their awareness of nutrition information (after participating in the Professor Popcorn program).”

—MSU Extension Nutrition Assistant

week for six weeks and meet Montana Health Enhancement Standards as established by the Office of Public Instruction. “Exploring the food pyramid with Professor Popcorn” and “Eat Smart/Play Hard” materials are utilized for school programs. “Out-of-School” programs are taught through partnerships with after-school programs such as Boys & Girls Clubs, the Salvation Army, YMCAs, and Title I after school groups. This youth curriculum teaches food safety and nutrition concepts through active play and snack preparation. Nutrition assistants also partner with USDA’s free summer lunch program to help children understand the role of nutrition and physical activity as it relates to their health.

Montana State University Extension Food and Nutrition offers a Food Safety Works Program, taught in conjunction with local extension agents and a school’s Family Consumer Science teacher, for high school students.

This specialized job-training class offers hands-on learning and a safe food handler’s certificate upon completion. Students receive training in safe food handling and food safety education to increase their job skills and readiness to begin a food service-related job. Teachers benefit through use of this consistent, effective curriculum for teaching safe food handling. Schools benefit through improvement in students’ knowledge and application of food safety practices as implemented in student stores, concession stands, student fundraisers and cafeteria programs. Over 500 Montana students have participated in the Food Safety Works program, reporting increased knowledge and safer food handling practices at home and at work. Montana students reported what they liked best about the program: “finding out how easily food can become contaminated,” and “learning ways to keep things safe.” Montana teachers reported the program is “fun while educational.”

For more information on the Food Safety Works Program, contact Lynn Paul, EdD, RD at MSU Extension Service, (406) 994-5702 or lpaul@montana.edu.



The Sixth Component of a Healthy School Nutrition Environment

MARKETING

Making healthy food choices and physical activity available for students is important. It is also necessary to educate students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community about the benefits of a healthy school nutrition environment and to motivate them to take action. Special promotions and events are great marketing tools. Herein lies the key to success—marketing your ideas and identifying motivated, willing partners help schools make changes.

Examples of Montana success stories—schools taking action for healthy kids:

Laurel Public School District serves 1,718

students, grades K–12, in Laurel. The 200 plus school district employees and their spouses are practicing healthy lifestyles via a districtwide Staff Wellness Program. The program originated several years ago with the districts' health insurance committee negotiating with their health insurance provider to use part of their wellness benefit funds to start a Wellness at Work Program. A health fair is offered each fall

with approximately 70 percent of the staff and spouses taking part. Other activities include a walking at work program, Weight Watchers® at work, fitness classes at work (yoga, pilates, tae bo), and social activities (golfing, bowling); along with monthly health-related newsletters included with staff's paychecks. Results have been encouraging with high participation rates and visible lifestyle changes amongst staff. Several people have lost over 100 pounds! The staff is also serving as very visible role models for the students, showing that they do indeed "practice what they preach" and enjoy doing it. Students receive positive, motivating messages about the value of being active and leading a healthy lifestyle.

St. Labre Indian School serves 520 students, grades K–12, in Ashland. This school excels in serving quality school meals, with a cultural focus, role modeling healthy behaviors, and marketing of their school foodservice program. The school meals meet the USDA standards for nutrient content, are presented in an eye-appealing manner, offer fresh fruit and vegetables daily, and often include bison and other cultural food items. From scratch cooking helps to decrease fat content and increase fiber. The school foodservice staff participates in a walking program, walking in the cafeteria and school hallways during their work day, thereby serving as healthy role models for the students. School menus are printed in a pleasant manner, featuring the healthy foods offered, and shared with parents and community. Parents are often encouraged to come to school for lunch with their children on special days, as well as any day throughout the year. Healthy eating and physical activity are actively promoted to students, parents, administrators and the community through a variety of avenues.

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

- Healthy eating and physical activity are actively promoted to students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community.
- Student's input is sought and taken into consideration while planning a healthy school nutrition environment.
- Schools work with a variety of media to spread the word about healthy school nutrition.
- Schools promote healthy food choices and restrict advertising that promotes less nutritious food choices.



Harlem Elementary School serves 316 students, grades K–6, in Harlem. A School Wellness Program has been established to teach, model, and provide opportunity for students to practice eating healthy and being physically active in an afterschool program. The program provides a non-competitive, fun physical activity which is followed by a healthy snack and nutrition education. Parents, teachers, and community members are also invited to attend. Participation and feedback from the students has been remarkable. A nutrition committee has been formed, with representation from school personnel, Indian Health Service, Tribal Health, the Fort Belknap Diabetes Prevention Program, students, and parents, and is working with the school foodservice to offer healthy school meals, healthy choices at concessions, and a non-food classroom rewards system. Partnering with community groups makes this program visible and is a great example of a team approach to helping raise well-nourished, active students.

West Valley Elementary School serves 348 students, grades K-8,

in Kalispell. Nutrition education is incorporated in a variety of ways via a committed group of teachers and administrators in this Montana Behavioral Initiative school. Healthy choices are presented throughout the curriculum. Students enjoy a mid-morning snack in the classroom. Students are allowed to bring a snack from home as long as it is nutritious, thereby involving parents in this nutrition education component as well. Many teachers encourage students to keep a water bottle at their desks, while teaching students about the importance of drinking water throughout the day. Pop machines are turned off during the school day. Water and juice are available all day long. This school's dedicated superintendent recently started a school lunch and breakfast program, based on his belief that if students are well nourished, they will learn and behave better. Students and their parents are especially pleased with the Grab n' Go breakfast. Marketing efforts and the service of tasty, healthy food have increased participation in school meals, which give students the nutrients they need for growth, increased ability to learn and good behavior. All of these benefit the students, staff and families in this community.

"Nutrition is a key part in how we will make a difference in the lives of our kids."

—Todd Fiske, Superintendent,
West Valley Elementary School